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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/54/3, A/54/56, A/54/57, A/54/59, A/54/61 and Corr.1, A/54/62, A/54/66-E/1999/6, A/54/98, A/54/128-E/1999/70, A/54/256, A/54/268 and A/54/388; A/C.3/54/L.2)

1. **Ms. Monroy** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that, in line with the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, the countries of the Rio Group had launched economic and social programmes designed to create favourable conditions for incorporating vulnerable population groups into the development process and to eliminate structural imbalances, particularly poverty and marginalization. In so doing, they emphasized the importance of education as a basic means of overcoming poverty and promoting integrated human development. As a result of their educational policies, those countries had achieved nearly universal coverage in the area of basic education. It was encouraging to note that the number of girls enrolled at the various levels of education was equal to, and in some cases greater than, the number of boys enrolled.

2. Efforts in the field of education currently focused on problems such as drop-out and repetition rates. Priority was given to working with families, such as by offering incentives to persuade parents not to remove their children from school in order to send them to work. School feeding programmes in several countries of the region had proved to be an effective means of keeping children in school and improving their performance. Efforts were also being made to improve school curricula, provide teachers with better training and higher pay and ensure that a higher proportion of students entered technical and higher education.

3. Owing to the high proportion of young people in the populations of the countries of the Rio Group, the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth was particularly important. However, those countries were also fully aware of their responsibility for addressing the issue of population ageing, and were committed to the creation of a society for all ages.

4. Speaking as the representative of Mexico, she said that her Government was investing more than ever before in programmes on health and nutrition, education and training, social security and basic services. The Food, Health and Education Programme (PROGRESA) targeted poor families, particularly indigenous families in rural communities, and support was provided for projects to generate employment and income. A citizens' advisory council on social development had been established to promote collaboration and dialogue between the authorities and civil society, with a view to the formulation of policies through an integrated approach. She recalled that the Fifth World Assembly of Disabled People's International had been held in Mexico City in December 1998 and that the declaration adopted at that meeting had set goals for future work.

5. Because young people made up a large proportion of Mexico's population, the country's national development plan for 1995 to 2000 had emphasized efforts to help young people become self-sufficient. The Government had re-established the Mexican Youth Institute to coordinate programmes and actions. The Institute, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), would organize a world summit on youth for a culture of peace at the threshold of the new millennium.

6. **Mrs. Gittens-Joseph** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member States that were Members of the United Nations, said that the participants in a recent regional meeting held in preparation for the Millennium Assembly had asserted that the twenty-first century must be the people's century. The world economy and globalization must be humanized, and microeconomic policies must be formulated with a view to improving the lives of ordinary people. The success of globalization must be judged by whether it benefited rich and poor alike while ensuring social justice and equity. National and international development policies must pay more attention to social issues. External debt, structural adjustment programmes, trade imbalances, financial crises, natural disasters and wars had all impeded social development.

7. Issues relating to youth were particularly important in view of the profound economic, political, social, cultural and environmental changes of the current era. CARICOM supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that the United Nations Youth Fund should be strengthened and focused on capacity-building for the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. It also agreed that the Youth Unit of the United Nations Secretariat should be strengthened. The Caribbean countries' efforts to empower young people through meaningful participation were exemplified by the Caribbean Youth Summit held in October 1998 to prepare for the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly. Youth forums and workshops were also

held to involve young people in addressing the issues that affected them, and projects were under way in marginalized communities to facilitate young people's social integration and reduce deviant behaviour.

8. The preparation of the entire population for the later stages of life should be an integral part of social policies. The statements made recently in the plenary Assembly on the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons should stimulate further action. In the 2002 review of the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing, more attention should be paid to the impact of technology on the aged, women and ageing and the relevance of services such as banking and health insurance to the needs of the aged. Development policies should reflect the view that the aged were a valuable social and economic resource. At the forthcoming meeting of the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development, a Caribbean Charter for Health and Ageing would be adopted.

9. CARICOM member States were making every effort to implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. Assistance from relevant United Nations agencies would help to expedite the implementation of those countries' national policies on the disabled. Many CARICOM members provided a disability assistance grant, and some exempted the disabled from the payment of customs duty and value-added tax on health-care equipment. Many Caribbean non-governmental organizations provided training for disabled persons to equip them with marketable skills, and some of those organizations received financial support from Governments and international agencies. Some of the CARICOM countries had taken steps to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 159 on the employment of disabled persons.

10. The importance of families as engines of economic and social development must be reflected in national development strategies and plans. CARICOM welcomed the Organization's intention to hold an Expert Group Meeting on the Development of a Framework on Family Policies. In the Caribbean, the pressures of unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, overcrowding and the rise in teenage pregnancy had led to a higher incidence of divorce, domestic violence and child neglect and abandonment. Some CARICOM countries had passed legislation and established government entities to address the social tragedy of domestic violence. Support services for victims and extensive public awareness programmes had been launched. Health and family-life education had been promoted at all levels of the educational system. Efforts were being made to promote equal partnership between men and women in family life; some countries had introduced legislation for that purpose. Many CARICOM countries had established national machinery to identify issues affecting the family and to provide appropriate support.

11. She welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends (A/54/57). Cooperatives were an important means of enabling citizens to play a significant role in overcoming poverty, securing productive employment and encouraging social integration. They reflected the values of cooperation and mutual assistance that were rooted in Caribbean culture, and had made a major contribution to national development in the Caribbean. Some countries had a national policy for cooperative development aimed at enabling that sector to contribute to job creation and business development, especially among young people.

12. **Mr. Yusoff** (Malaysia) said that his Government had formulated an integrated national youth policy, which it had reviewed in 1997 to emphasize the acquisition of knowledge, the development of skills and entrepreneurship, healthy lifestyles, character-building, social interaction, the development of smart partnership and international networking. The aim was to create a generation of young people who were well educated, united, democratic, tolerant, competitive, ethical and scientifically and technologically progressive. Malaysia's youth programmes were fully integrated into other social development programmes.

13. In view of the need to enhance opportunities in all fields for people with disabilities and to remove all social, physical and economic barriers to their full participation in society, his Government provided education, training and rehabilitation programmes to disabled persons. Twenty-six special schools met the needs of children with disabilities and learning difficulties. Malaysia welcomed the work of non-governmental organizations in providing social services to the disabled. In the future, more community-based rehabilitation schemes would be set up to help families care for the disabled and to facilitate their integration into society. Accessibility would continue to be improved and training programmes would continue to be implemented to ensure better employment opportunities for the disabled.

14. Programmes for older persons should take into account the need to provide the latter with greater financial and personal independence and to develop a relationship of mutual reliance rather than dependency. Malaysia promoted the concept of a caring society; accordingly, families would continue to be primarily responsible for caring for older persons. The Government would assist them by providing tax relief for the medical expenses of older persons and by

modifying housing designs to accommodate extended families.

15. The family played a key role in instilling the moral and ethical values that produced good and responsible citizens. The new risks and pressures created by technological advances and demographic and socio-economic changes must be addressed in an effective and timely manner. In general, the successful implementation of social development programmes depended on effective cooperation and coordination among all the actors involved, including the international community.

16. **Mr. Gautam** (Nepal) said it was disheartening that, four years after the World Summit for Social Development, its goals — poverty eradication, full employment and social integration — were still far from being achieved. Poverty eradication was the main gateway to social development, especially in developing countries. Achieving that goal would require political will, national action and international cooperation at all levels. The special session of the General Assembly in 2000 should focus on poverty eradication as its top priority.

17. His Government had developed specific policies and programmes on social protection. They involved mobilizing local resources, strengthening and developing social-welfare centres, especially for victims of drug addiction and natural disasters, and fostering public awareness of the need for social protection of women. His Government acknowledged the important role of non-governmental organizations and civil society in social development.

18. His delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/54/59). In view of the important role of youth in nation-building, his Government placed a high priority on mobilizing young people to participate in the social and economic development of the country.

19. His delegation further welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the International Year of Older Persons (A/54/268). Modern democratic societies should provide economic and social protection to senior citizens.

20. The activities of the United Nations system aimed at meeting the basic needs of disabled persons should be supported. His Government had adopted substantial measures to protect the rights of the elderly and disabled and provide them with essential services.

21. **Ms. Shanter** (Sudan) said that social development could not be separated from economic development and could only take place in a climate of peace and stability. The Government of the Sudan was still endeavouring to bring peace to the south of the country, as evidenced by its positive response to calls for a ceasefire from the Security Council, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the European Union. In August 1999 it had declared a comprehensive ceasefire and announced its readiness for a permanent ceasefire and separation of forces in order to facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid. The rebel movement, however, continued to reject the calls made, thus prolonging the war and the suffering of civilians.

22. Youth was the driving force of the development process, and the Government had therefore established a comprehensive national strategy for youth and had presented its youth policies at the 1998 Lisbon World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. Given the importance of education in raising the level of awareness and maturity among young people, the Government had expanded opportunities for higher education and had, over the past five years, established a university in each of the country's 26 constituent states. It had also endeavoured to promote and implement the principle of "education for all" and had continued its efforts to eliminate adult illiteracy in remote areas.

23. The Sudan was endeavouring to achieve the complete integration of disabled persons in society and, prompted by the General Assembly's proclamation of 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons, it had enacted a law on the welfare and rehabilitation of disabled persons in 1984 and had established a national council for the handicapped.

24. International conferences had recommended concern for family rights and the integration of the family in all activities for sustainable development. The Sudan felt it was necessary to protect the family as an important social institution from the many social ills arising from the endeavour of some contemporary societies to restrict the role of the family and alter its significance.

25. In the Sudan, the family occupied pride of place in the social structure. The State had therefore adopted a policy of facilitating marriage as providing the natural milieu for the establishment of families, had enacted laws to regulate family rights and the rights of family members and had accorded special attention to rural and migrant families. It had recently established a project for families engaged in production in order to enable them to achieve economic stability by equipping them with the means to produce. Vulnerable families had also benefited from State action in establishing a council for the welfare of orphans and widows. The Sudan had also established national projects to provide clothing and shelter to families that had been

subjected to the attacks of the rebel army in the south of the country.

26. On the threshold of the new millennium, it was a source for pessimism that the developing countries were still required to struggle ceaselessly for the elimination of poverty. In a world in which the developing countries were facing the challenges of globalization, chronic problems still presented a stumbling block to their efforts to establish genuine concepts of social development. Those problems included indebtedness, the impact of restructuring programmes, the paucity of financial resources, the interruption in the flow of official development assistance from donor countries and the marginalization of the developing countries in the market economy.

27. The time was approaching for the year 2000 review of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. Five years after the commitments given at the Social Summit, the poorer countries were still experiencing an increased incidence of diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, poor educational and basic health services, higher rates of unemployment, the emigration of educated personnel to the richer countries and continuing wars and conflicts.

28. The international community, and the wealthy donor countries in particular, must discharge their obligations to the developing countries. The time had come to create an appropriate climate in which all human beings could enjoy a life of dignity. It was shameful that, in Africa, children should continue to die of hunger, disease and homelessness caused by poverty and war while their counterparts in the rich countries of the North enjoyed all the social services required to produce a future generation of nation-builders. Should that situation continue, the gap between North and South would only widen further. The Copenhagen commitments must be implemented, the principle of partnership between States must be given effect and the efforts of non-governmental organizations and the international community must be coordinated in order to achieve the goals approved by all at the 1995 Summit.

29. There was international awareness that social conditions in the world had deteriorated, it was acknowledged that social development could not be separated from economic development and from a climate of stability and peace, and globalization had become a reality. All of those challenges must be met. While global approaches were to be welcomed, it was also important to respect the particular character of specific societies so that tolerance could be the basis for interaction between societies. One world order and uniform standards that were applied to all societies without regard for the culture, customs, traditions and heritage of each could never promote social development.

30. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) said that, in an age when technology made the world seem smaller and individuals tended to be isolated from one another, the restoration of the family was the surest remedy for many social ills.

31. Words alone would not suffice to preserve the sacredness of the institution of the family; action was needed. First and foremost was the principle that the family was based on the marriage of a man and a woman. There must also be an awareness that every human life was a precious gift, that pregnancy was not a disease, that children were a blessing, that persons with disabilities deserved special care and consideration and that older persons were worthy of veneration and esteem.

32. Parents had a special responsibility to care for and educate their children. At the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held at Lisbon in 1998, his delegation had stressed that there must be an inseparable link between policies to benefit youth and policies to benefit the family. In a strong family, parents transmitted to their children the fundamental values that led to their becoming virtuous men and women, helping to shape a peaceful and prosperous world.

33. Not all families were in the same situation. Families that had to care for persons with disabilities appeared to face exceptional and trying circumstances. In reality, however, such situations could bring a family closer together. Under no circumstances should persons with disabilities be considered any less human or less worthy of life. Proper assistance must be given to families who cared for disabled loved ones.

34. As the end of the International Year of Older Persons approached, his delegation wished to stress the theme of intergenerational solidarity. While democratic and commercial societies obviously placed a high premium on youth, humanity itself was humiliated when the wisdom of elders was ignored. Through appropriate policies, States should ensure that respected and venerable elders were able to participate in the life of a society.

35. **Mr. Krokhmal** (Ukraine) said that his country, like many other countries with economies in transition, was undergoing a profound transformation. In seeking to overcome the difficulties inherent in economic reforms, his Government viewed the establishment of an effective social-

protection system as a major task. It had established a comprehensive social programme to overcome the negative impact of the economic crisis. Despite the lack of funds, all possible measures were being taken to avoid cutting social expenditure. A reform of the social-insurance system was under way. Plans had been made to reform the pension system by setting up a scale of payments based on the contribution made by each member of society.

36. The proportion of youth in the population had grown steadily in recent years and now accounted for over 20 per cent, or 10 million people. His Government attached great importance to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. National legislation had been enacted to respond to the needs of young people. In the past two years, the State Committee for Family and Youth Affairs, in conjunction with youth non-governmental organizations, had implemented over 200 programmes to improve the status of youth.

37. In the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, his Government had made every effort to improve the situation of the disabled. Special legislation had been enacted to ensure equality and non-discrimination and to enable disabled persons to participate fully in the life of the country. His Government's strategy was based on the United Nations Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. They had been incorporated into the relevant government programmes, including programmes to promote the development of the orthopaedic industry and to provide disabled persons with mechanical and motorized devices. Non-governmental organizations also made an important contribution to the rehabilitation and active participation of disabled persons.

38. **Mr. Jayanama** (Thailand) said that his Government gave high priority to promoting social development at home and fostering effective international cooperation in that area. Thailand had adopted a people-centred approach to development. The Eighth National Plan for Social and Economic Development reflected the emphasis in the Copenhagen Declaration on the human being as the centre of all development activities and as their prime beneficiary. His Government was working in partnership with the private sector and civil society to ensure that economic growth proceeded hand in hand with the development of society as a whole, so that no one was excluded from the development process. Special attention was given to vulnerable groups, including women, children, the elderly and the disabled. While its close-knit families and strong agricultural base had enabled Thailand to weather the 1997 financial crisis, the existing social safety nets had been severely tested and the crisis had served as a reminder that social development could not be treated as secondary to economic development.

39. Education was a great equalizer and it should therefore be a cause for concern that some 875 million people worldwide remained illiterate. The international community must work towards ensuring equal access to education for all. Thailand, for its part, had hosted the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990). The World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs adopted at the Conference had focused on early childhood care and development; access to and completion of primary education; the significant reduction of levels of illiteracy; improved learning achievement; the provision of basic non-formal education and skills training for youth and adults; and acquisition by families and individuals of the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to enhance quality of life. Thailand strongly supported the proposed launching of a United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy, beginning in the year 2000, and looked forward to the holding of the World Education Forum in Senegal in April 2000.

40. While education for all was a long-term goal, the immediate priority must be human resources development. Accordingly, at the July ministerial meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) held in Singapore, Thailand had proposed the establishment of an ASEAN human resources development centre and a human resources development fund with a view to strengthening the capacity of men and women in the ASEAN region to meet effectively the challenges of globalization. Thailand would work actively with its ASEAN partners towards the realization of the centre and the fund, but it was also counting on the support and cooperation of the international community and international organizations, including the United Nations bodies concerned. Education and human resources development must provide not only the ability to earn a livelihood, but also the ability to think and care about others, and they should therefore promote respect for human rights and good governance, which were inalienable elements of social development.

41. The special session of the General Assembly devoted to the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development to be held in Geneva in June 2000 would provide an opportunity to reflect on what had been achieved, and what remained to be done. Since ideology and determination alone could not secure social development in developing countries, there must be an effort during the special session to strengthen international partnerships with a view to mobilizing the necessary financial assistance, technical know-how and human resources.

42. **Mrs. Brobbey** (Ghana) said that, despite initiatives at the national, regional and international levels, the goals of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) were far from being attained. Indeed, the disparity between rich and poor nations continued to widen, and much of the world's population was afflicted by poverty, malnutrition, unemployment and social exclusion. While social development was the responsibility of Governments, her delegation believed that, without the creation of an international enabling environment, developing countries could hardly achieve the goals of the Copenhagen Summit. In many of those countries, structural adjustment policies were exacerbating poverty among their populations. Despite the growing recognition of the need to integrate the social and economic dimensions of policy, attention remained focused in practice on economic parameters. Priority must be given to health promotion, job creation, basic education and social protection, in particular for vulnerable groups.

43. Her delegation commended the adoption of the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, and the Braga Youth Action Plan, which were aimed at addressing the problems of young people and making them partners in development. Those instruments were important tools for the social integration of young people, and it was therefore imperative that Governments should make a commitment to implementing their provisions with the participation of youth organizations from their respective countries. In Ghana, where young people were considered the most important and productive segment of the population, special emphasis was placed on providing quality education and professional training to prepare them to play an active role in society.

44. The proclamation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons was an opportunity to highlight the talents, wealth of knowledge and experience of older persons and increase awareness of their problems and the fast rate at which society was ageing. In developing countries, traditional family support for older persons was diminishing because of economic hardship. It was to be hoped that the activities of the Year would draw attention to the problem of the migration of young people from rural areas and its effect on the aged in the third world.

45. Disabled persons, like the aged, were a vulnerable group. Her Government's efforts to expand its services to disabled persons, which included schools and training centres to equip them with the requisite skills for employment and integration in society, were hampered by budgetary constraints. Other developing countries were facing similar problems, and she therefore called for international cooperation to address the needs of disabled persons, as well as the elderly, in the developing world.

46. In Ghana, the family was cherished and protected as the natural and fundamental unit of society. In keeping with that belief, Ghanaian legislation on inheritance, the rights of spouses, and the formation and dissolution of families had been revised. Her delegation appreciated the tireless efforts of the United Nations system as well as non-governmental organizations to raise awareness of family issues and to support Governments in the formulation of family policies. It was concerned, however, at the decline in contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities. Member States must increase their contributions to the Fund if the objectives of the International Year of the Family were to be achieved.

47. **Mr. Bilman** (Turkey) noted that progress had been made towards eradicating poverty, eliminating inequalities, improving the quality of life for all, including disabled persons and the elderly, and promoting family values, but much remained to be done. However, given the importance attached to those goals by individual countries and the international community, there was cause to be optimistic regarding the future of the world's social situation.

48. Social development had ranked high among the priorities of successive Turkish Governments. Legislation had been reformed and measures introduced to combat poverty and unemployment; participation in policy-making had been broadened; the social-security system was being reformed, with a view to making it less burdensome on the economy; and an unemployment insurance scheme was in the pipeline.

49. Turkey had the youngest population in Europe. His Government recognized that, while Turkey's young people were an asset, significant attention and resources were required to meet their needs. Over the years, Turkey had drawn on United Nations themes and guidelines in developing national programmes for youth, and had wholeheartedly supported such international initiatives as the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. It was in that spirit that Turkey, which had been an active participant in the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (Lisbon, 1998), had offered to host the second World Conference, as well as the World Youth Forum and World Youth Festival, in Istanbul in 2002. That offer had been noted with appreciation at the February session of the Commission for Social Development.

50. **Mr. Hadjiargyrou** (Cyprus) said that since 1996 the primary vehicle for promoting issues related to older persons in Cyprus had been the Coordinating Agency for Older Persons, composed of governmental and non-governmental representatives and chaired by the Minister of Labour and

Social Insurance. The proposals of the Agency were usually adopted as official policy by the Government. In celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, the Agency had organized a number of events; the Ministry of Education and Culture had launched an art and essay-writing competition in the primary and secondary schools; and the University of Cyprus had done an in-depth study of older persons in Cyprus. Other commemorative events included a television documentary and a photographic competition.

51. The main features of the Government's policy concerning persons with disabilities were to safeguard equal rights and provide equal opportunities; promote full and equal participation by disabled persons in the social and economic life of the country, deinstitutionalize disabled persons and promote independent living; and provide financial assistance to organizations of the disabled. Services were provided in medical rehabilitation; education; training and retraining; vocational assessment and guidance; placement in employment in the open market, sheltered employment, self-employment and supported employment; provision of technical aids; removal of social and physical barriers; provision of allowances; and financial assistance to disabled persons for purchasing their own homes. Laws had been amended to allow for the free and safe movement of persons with disabilities on public roads and sidewalks and in public buildings, hotels and restaurants. New laws had been drafted against discrimination in employment and education. Removal of social barriers was being pursued through activities aimed at raising public awareness. Persons with disabilities participated in committees and boards that dealt with their concerns at the national and local levels, including the Rehabilitation Council of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the central body for discussion of all issues concerning disabled persons.

52. Over the past decade and a half, there had been gradual devolution of responsibility for youth issues from government bodies to non-governmental organizations, culminating in the creation of the Youth Board, an umbrella organization. The Government's policy, implemented in close collaboration with the Youth Board, was to provide young people with equal opportunities and treatment, while promoting their personal and social development. The specific objectives were to encourage young people to participate in the affairs of the country; to guarantee young people education and training for integration into economic life; to help young couples acquire their own homes; to help young people to set up their own businesses; to run youth clubs, mainly in rural areas; to set up a youth information centre; and to promote youth-exchange programmes. The Youth Board could submit proposals to the Government on youth policy and initiate new programmes not covered by other departments. The Board was also responsible for liaison with international organizations on international cooperation programmes, such as the Council of Europe's campaign against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance and the European Union's programme, Youth for Europe III. The Youth Board provided funding for youth exchange programmes and participation of young people in international seminars and other projects of national youth organizations.

53. **Mr. Nikiforov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation agreed that the fundamental responsibility for addressing social-development issues lay with States. His Government was making a concerted effort to mitigate the effects of the difficult economic situation in which the Russian Federation found itself. It was establishing mechanisms to protect the incomes of public-sector workers and providing social assistance to vulnerable groups. It was also implementing measures to reduce the disparity in the living standards of the various categories of the population, enhance protection of employment and social rights, target social assistance more effectively, and achieve financial and social stability. It had taken into account in its social programmes the main points that had emerged from the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995).

54. International cooperation was needed to supplement efforts at the national level in order to address social problems. Much had been achieved under United Nations auspices. The Russian Federation welcomed the outcome of the thirty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development, in particular the Agreed Conclusions on Social Services for All adopted by the Commission. The special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 for the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development should give fresh impetus to the elaboration of strategies and programmes aimed at enhancing the position of socially vulnerable groups, including young people, older persons and the disabled. The Russian Federation had supported the idea of holding the special session from the very outset and had actively participated in the work of the Preparatory Committee.

55. His delegation welcomed the proclamation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, and the efforts to implement the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The Commonwealth of Independent States had established an organizing committee to coordinate activities to mark the Year within the Commonwealth, while his Government had set up a national preparatory committee for the Year.

56. The Russian Federation was convinced that more could be done to implement the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit. The bodies of the United Nations system should play a stronger role in coordinating efforts to that end. The Commission for Social Development should work more actively alongside interested countries, and its participation in monitoring the implementation of decisions adopted previously in the context of the follow-up to the Summit should be increased.

57. The Russian Federation supported the efforts to strengthen the leading role of the United Nations in the social aspects of international cooperation. It believed that such cooperation should be given high priority within the Organization, and that the interests of the various groups of States, including countries with economies in transition, must be taken into account. It was hopeful that the special session in June 2000 would contribute to the attainment of those goals.

58. **Ms. Otiti** (Uganda) said that progress in social development must include reduced poverty, greater choices and opportunities, better quality of life and better health, yet a large portion of the world's population had remained untouched by those changes. The gap between rich and poor had widened, and as a result institutions, including the family, had been weakened. The prospects for young people were for the most part bleak. Many feared to grow up, because abject poverty would become their problem to solve. The scourge of diseases like HIV/AIDS had robbed many young people of hope for a life of any kind. Some lived a modest life overshadowed by the great achievements of their forebears, which the conditions of their lives offered them no opportunity to emulate. Some youth were merely looking forward to adulthood so that they could spend what they had inherited. Only a few would be fortunate enough to grow up to enjoy the fruits of their own efforts.

59. Although Uganda was one of the world's poorest nations, it was nonetheless addressing children's needs. The Poverty Action Fund had doubled the number of children attending primary school. Approximately 90 per cent of the children of Uganda were now able to complete primary education. Uganda wished to express its gratitude to the United States of America, the United Kingdom, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations for helping to make that goal a reality.

60. Uganda had recognized that the disabled were a very important part of society and had reserved two seats in Parliament specifically for the disabled. It was encouraging that the world was beginning to acknowledge that not only the disabled but also older persons were an asset to society.

61. **Mr. Aleman** (Ecuador) said that he had the honour to introduce two youth representatives from his national delegation.

62. **Ms. Murgueitio** (Ecuador) urged all Member States to allow their young people to contribute to the development of their countries and to hear their ideas and requests: the right to participate in legislative debates, the implementation of national youth policies, the establishment of agencies to guarantee their rights, the creation of youth social-investment funds and of institutions working for and with young people. Youth had both the right to participate and the duty to help build a more just society.

63. **Ms. Vicuña** (Ecuador) said that, when invited to speak before the United Nations, she had imagined that she would find far more young people at the meetings raising issues and debating the requirements of world integration; their absence made it clear how far there was yet to go. A step along that road had been taken at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, where the participants had committed themselves to implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth and to creating networks that would foster the establishment of permanent mechanisms for youth participation. The youth of Ecuador worked actively through local, regional and national forums, convinced that by their joint efforts they could find a way to transform their society. Through their representation today at the United Nations, their dreams were beginning to become reality. They would like to see the sub-item of youth under social development become an item in its own right on the agenda of the Third Committee.

64. **Mr. Al-Humaimidi** (Iraq) said that it was difficult to speak of social development in isolation from economic development, which were two sides of the same coin. International instruments had affirmed the right to development as a basic and inalienable human right, and development had become the dominant preoccupation of the developing countries in a world characterized by globalization and marked by its adverse effects.

65. In Iraq, a developing country, there were other challenges to be faced arising out of the devastating consequences of the economic embargo that had now been maintained against the country for more than nine years. The scale of the damage done to the country's social development could be gauged from the situation in the areas of health and education.

66. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), before 1991 some 97 per cent of urban residents and 78 per cent of rural residents had had access to health care. The health-care system had had an extensive network of health

facilities linked by reliable communications and a large fleet of vehicles and ambulances. The calculations of the United Nations Secretariat showed that, after the imposition of the embargo and the aggression against Iraq, infant mortality had risen from 64 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 129 per 1,000 in 1995 and the incidence of low birth weight had risen from 4 per cent in 1990 to about 25 per cent in 1997. The capacity of health-care facilities to provide services had also deteriorated and the communications network had collapsed. Infectious diseases that had previously been brought under control had reappeared and had become endemic.

67. UNICEF had reported that the Government of Iraq had made large-scale investments in the education sector between the mid-1970s and 1990. UNESCO had stated that it had been part of Iraq's educational policy to provide grants, facilities for research and medical care for students. In 1989 enrolment in elementary and secondary schools had been 75 per cent, or a little more than the average for developing countries. School enrolment for all ages had fallen to 53 per cent, and in the central and southern governorates 80 per cent of school buildings were in need of repair; progress in the elimination of illiteracy had been halted. According to UNESCO figures, the number of absentees from elementary schools had risen from some 96,000 in 1990 to over 130,000 in 1999.

68. The report of the second panel concerning the current humanitarian situation in Iraq (S/1999/356, annex II), had referred to the qualitative dimension of the impact of the sanctions and to the cumulative effects of sustained deprivation on the psychosocial cohesion of the Iraqi population as indicated by an increase in juvenile delinquency, begging and prostitution, anxiety about the future and lack of motivation, and a rising sense of isolation. WHO had pointed out that the number of mental-health patients attending health facilities had risen by 157 per cent between 1990 and 1998. The report had also stated that the cumulative effect of the sanctions regime and of economic decline on the social fabric of Iraq had been particularly evident to the first-hand observers who had communicated with the panel. According to the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, unemployment and low salaries were forcing Iraqis with higher levels of education to abandon jobs as teachers or doctors and either to emigrate or to seek employment as taxi drivers or security guards and the like, thus adding to the problems in the areas of health and education.

69. Development could not take place without the presence of two basic elements, namely financial resources and international cooperation. Iraq had been deprived of both by the imposition and maintenance of the embargo and the ongoing military aggression against it. The strong desire of Iraq's leadership and of its people to advance development as an option to which there was no alternative had nevertheless prompted the country to use the scarce resources available to it for the basic requirements of development and to channel them in such a way as to mitigate the consequences of the embargo.

70. The international community must be faithful to the commitments it had made at the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development. It must remove the sanctions that one country was placing in the way of development in Iraq, a country whose Secretary of State had, before the aggression of January 1991, threatened to return Iraq to the pre-industrial age. The first step in the right direction would be to lift the embargo imposed on Iraq, which had never had any justification and now had no rationale whatever when Iraq had discharged its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions.

71. **Miss Blackwood** (Jamaica), speaking as a youth representative, said that her delegation supported the statement made by Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). On behalf of the youth of her country, she wished to comment on some of the situations that presented a particular threat to young people. One such threat was the increase in armed conflicts and the use of children and young people as pawns in warfare, whether as targets or perpetrators. All concerned parties must work together to transform the vicious cycle of war into a culture of peace. Another situation that threatened young people was the widening gap between developed and developing countries. Despite the promised benefits of globalization developing countries were being increasingly marginalized in the world economy and faced problems of access to markets, capital and technology. The problems created by that international environment made the societies of developing countries like Jamaica more susceptible to criminal activities, drug-trafficking and the proliferation of small arms. Once again, it was the young people who usually fell victim to the dangers. The youth of Jamaica urged continued international cooperation on such matters as finance and development, poverty eradication and international drug control.

72. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the adoption of the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, and the Braga Youth Action Plan were all important mechanisms for generating international cooperation. But the United Nations did not bear sole responsibility for action; the individual Member States must also play an important role. The Government of Jamaica had implemented a national youth policy aimed at

giving young people the opportunity to develop their full mental, social, spiritual and physical potential through training programmes to assist youth to be responsible, productive citizens.

73. Some of the initiatives implemented under the policy included the National Youth Service Programme, which enabled young persons aged 17 to 24 who were neither employed nor enrolled in an educational institution to receive job training and an opportunity to continue their education. Another example was a special training and empowerment programme launched in 1997 to provide young people with training in hospitality management, information technology and office-administration technology. In addition, courses had been developed to provide formal training in youth development and youth studies. The Government had also undertaken public awareness campaigns on drug abuse within the schools and the community at large. Similar programmes had been implemented to address the issue of HIV/AIDS.

74. The Jamaican Government had embraced the idea that young people should be given the opportunity to be heard. During the past year the Prime Minister had travelled around the country and held public forums with young people to discuss the issues affecting them. In 1998 a youth technology consultant had been appointed to accompany the Minister of Commerce and Technology to technology events dealing with youth-related matters and to provide the Minister with a young person's perspective on the world of information and technology.

75. She would urge the international community to remember that the rationale behind the World Programme of Action for Youth was not only to identify and create youth policies and programmes, but also to give youth an opportunity to be active participants.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.